

# The Florida House of Representatives

Chris Sprowls Speaker

**NEWS RELEASE** 

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# Florida House Closes Session with Transformational Wins for Floridians, Preparing the State for Years to Come

From protecting life to empowering parents, the Florida House fought for lasting positive change for Florida families this Session under the leadership of Speaker Chris Sprowls

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** (*March 14, 2022*) — **Speaker of the Florida House Chris Sprowls,** R-Palm Harbor, marked the end of the 2022 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature by heralding the transformational nature of the body's work to manage risks, meet the challenges of today and prepare Florida for tomorrow.

"Politics shouldn't be about catering to the most powerful voices or cowering in fear from the angriest voices — it's about giving a voice to the everyday moms and dads who pay their bills, go to work and parent their children. Those are the real heroes this session, and those are the people we are here to serve," said **Speaker Sprowls.** "Whether it's protecting life, empowering families and fathers, celebrating law enforcement heroes, building resilient communities, or valuing every individual for what is on the inside, I am proud of the work we have done this session and last to build a better Florida for our children. As a father of young boys, I think about the version of Florida that I want them to grow up in, and I've strived to champion policy over the past two years that pushes us closer to that ideal now and for decades to come."

From designation day to the start of the 2022 Session, the Speaker consistently challenged House Members to deliver on several forward-looking ideas — from the first-ever statewide book delivery program and statewide flooding plan to finally tackling the fatherhood crisis — that would transform the lives of everyday Floridians for years to come. These initiatives and the results were highlighted in a video [watch here] shown on the House Floor last week highlighting Speaker Sprowls' legacy of success.

The following bills championed by the Speaker this session have now either been signed into law by Governor DeSantis or await his signature:

### **Empowering Families**

From Florida's unborn to our seniors and every family in between, Members of the Florida House championed legislation to uplift Floridians and promote their core values.

• HB 7065, sponsored by **House Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee Chair Thad Altman**, R-Indialantic, encourages responsible fatherhood, alleviates the crisis of at-risk boys, and offers support for foster children — especially those who age out of care. The bill establishes programs to address the needs of fathers and awards grants to organizations that help struggling single fathers to become self-sufficient and meet their child support obligations. Also, the bill designates June as Responsible Fatherhood Month across Florida.

"This bill is just the beginning. Florida will be an example for the nation to bring fathers back to families and make families whole again," said **Representative Thad Altman**. "We have an opportunity to change families' trees forever for the lives of fatherless sons and daughters."

• HB 5, sponsored by **House Judiciary Committee Chair Erin Grall**, R-Vero Beach, and **Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka**, R-Fort Myers, will reduce Florida's fetal and infant mortality by ending the practice of abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy and investing in initiatives to support the health of mothers and young babies.

"This law will save children," said **Representative Erin Grall**. "We stand with the men and women who could not be here today to stand for life, because all life matters and has value."

• HB 7, sponsored by **House Speaker pro tempore Bryan Avila**, R-Miami Springs, ensures that education and workplace training materials are consistent with the shared American value that all people are created equal. It provides teachers a clear and unifying framework to teach about history and current events and helps them teach from objective facts and not from divisive ideologies. HB 7 is also the most substantial expansion of the African American history curriculum in Florida public schools in two decades.

"This legislation provides teachers with a clear and unifying framework to teach the facts about history and current events – and not divisive ideologies," said **Representative Bryan Avila**. "As an instructor, I believe it's important to provide teachers a clear framework to provide expectations of what to teach."

• HB 1557, sponsored by **Representative Joe Harding**, R-Ocala, preserves parents' rights to be engaged in the education of their children. It protects Florida's youngest children from being instructed on topics that are not age or developmentally-appropriate before they are ready. It gives parents the power to be the first to instruct their young children if and when they feel it is appropriate for their child.

"A parent's greatest responsibility is to make sure that their children are healthy and safe, and with the passage of HB 1557, we are ensuring that parents have access to the information from schools they need to do so," said **Representative Joe Harding**. "This bill equips parents to support children in their development and encourages open dialogue in Florida families, and I'm proud to see it ready for Governor DeSantis' signature."

• HB 1119, sponsored by **House Local Administration & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee Chair Jackie Toledo**, R-Tampa, creates a point of access to courts for grandparents whose child was killed and courts have ruled against the surviving parent in a wrongful death claim or criminal conviction for the death of the other parent.

Representative Jackie Toledo said, "In a situation where a child has already experienced the trauma of the loss of a parent, it's important that they have an opportunity to have a relationship with their grandparents. This bill gives grandparents, in certain situations, the opportunity to retain a close bond with their grandchildren and get through tragedy as a family."

#### **Protecting & Preparing Florida**

As the nation's third-largest state and one surrounded by water on three sides, Florida has experienced its share of natural and man-made disasters. This session, the Florida Legislature made great strides to build on last session's work to protect residents, communities and institutions against future threats to Floridians' way of life.

- HB 7053, sponsored by **Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera**, R-Coral Gables, builds on last year's "Always Ready" plan by establishing the Statewide Office of Resilience in the Governor's Office and directing state highway officials to identify roads subject to flooding and create an action plan by June 30, 2023.
  - "Building upon the 'Always Ready' legislation from last session, we continue to prioritize efforts to prepare our communities and our state against the effects of flooding and sea-level rise," said **Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera**. "Together we are taking steps to make Florida more resilient and Always Ready."
- HB 7055, sponsored by **Representative Mike Giallombardo**, R-Cape Coral, equips Florida to combat cybercrimes through improvements in incident reporting and standardized preventative training. The bill calls for a comprehensive upgrade of cybersecurity infrastructure to protect the state and local governments for years to come.
  - "It's critical that we make the necessary changes in our training, reporting and processes to prevent and thwart future cybercrime to protect our institutions and our residents," said **Representative Mike Giallombardo**. "We will harden our defenses and make sure our local officials and prosecutors have the right tools to fight cybercrime."
- HB 7023 and HB 7025 (SB 96 and SB 98), sponsored by **Representative Dana Trabulsy**, R-Fort Pierce, provide additional emergency powers to the Governor to prepare the state against threats posed by any emergency and to act quickly to mitigate

the negative effects. The bill creates the Emergency Preparedness and Response Fund (EPR Fund) for the Governor to use exclusively during emergencies; ensures that funding for disaster relief or response comes first from state and local agency funds, then from the EPR Fund; and allows the Governor to request additional funds from the Legislative Budget Commission if necessary.

"We need to make sure that Florida's chief executive has the tools at his disposal to meet the challenges of state emergencies and to take swift action to protect our residents, property and institutions," said **Representative Dana Trabulsy**.

• HB 7021 (SB 7014), sponsored by **House Health and Human Services Committee Chair Colleen Burton**, R-Lakeland, extends COVID-19 liability protections for health care providers and long-term care facilities that passed last year in SB 72 to claims that accrue before June 1, 2023.

"New variants of the COVID-19 virus continue to prolong the current pandemic, and health care providers and long-term care facilities continue to risk their own health to stay open and responsibly care for Floridians," said **Representative Colleen Burton**. "We should continue to protect them from unnecessary lawsuits that threaten their livelihood."

#### **Uplifting Law Enforcement**

Florida's law enforcement community serves and protects Florida residents and communities out of duty and a personal commitment to safety. To honor their service, lawmakers passed several key pieces of legislation this session.

• HJR 1, sponsored by **House Agriculture & Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Josie Tomkow**, R- Polk City, recognizes the hard work and dedication of Florida's critical public employees by providing them an additional \$50,000 homestead exemption to their property tax assessment. Florida voters will have the opportunity to provide a historic property tax exemption for law enforcement officers, members of the Florida National Guard, K-12 classroom teachers, firefighters, active duty military, correctional officers and child welfare services professionals and EMTs and paramedics at the ballot box this November.

Representative Josie Tomkow said, "We are going to make Florida the most homeowner-friendly state in the nation, and this bill is the next major step in that process. As a seventh-generation Floridian, I know firsthand the joys of homeownership of this great state. With close to 1,000 moving to our state each day, we need to keep working to make the dream of homeownership a reality for more Floridians."

• HB 3, sponsored by **House Redistricting Committee Chair Tom Leek**, R-Ormond Beach, is the latest bill from the Florida House that honors the sacrifice and duty of Florida's law enforcement to its citizens and communities. It designates May 1 of each year as "Law Enforcement Appreciation Day," and provides significant incentives to prospective members of Florida's law enforcement personnel. It also creates a scholarship to cover tuition and other expenses for basic recruit training programs.

"In Florida, we respect and honor our law enforcement, and we are willing to put our money where our mouth is by funding additional training and education scholarships for their children," said **Representative Tom Leek**. "In Florida, we don't defund the police, not now — not ever."

#### **Improving Transparency and Accountability in our Schools**

Florida's teachers and schools are some of the best in the nation. Florida's K-12 achievement is ranked 3rd in the nation and the state was ranked the #1 system for higher education in the nation for the 5th straight year by *US News and World Report*. But high rankings are not enough. Legislation was passed this session to increase accountability and transparency in K-12 and post-secondary schools so that students can continue to enjoy the best education system possible.

• HB 1467, sponsored by **Representative Sam Garrison**, R-Fleming Island, makes elected school board members accountable to their communities through public input and term limits. It promotes public participation by ensuring that any district school board meeting held to rank, eliminate, or select instructional materials is advertised and open to the public. It also protects students by putting textbooks used for required instruction topics through a rigorous vetting process to ensure that they are age-appropriate, support state academic standards, and allow parental contribution.

"Florida's students deserve the best, and that means ensuring our schools' leaders are accountable to parents for decisions that impact our kids," said **Representative Sam Garrison**. "Florida families can be confident that instructional materials are unbiased, focused on student success and have passed rigorous review."

• HB 7051 (SB 7044), sponsored by **House Post-Secondary Education & Lifelong Learning Subcommittee Chair Amber Mariano**, R-Hudson, increases accountability in accreditation by not allowing public state colleges and universities to be accredited by the same accrediting agency or association for consecutive cycles. It promotes transparency by requiring state colleges and universities to keep searchable, downloadable lists of required and recommended textbooks and instructional materials including course syllabi information. It also requires state colleges and universities to clearly communicate tuition and fees and proposed changes.

"Colleges and universities should set students on a track for success, and to do so, they need to be transparent, accountable and affordable," said **Representative Amber Mariano**. "Students will be able to easily know what textbooks are required and how much they owe in tuition and fees. This bill will help them budget and plan for the future."

## Saving & Securing Taxpayer Dollars

• HB 7071, sponsored by **House Ways & Means Chair Bobby Payne**, R-Palatka, includes over \$1 billion in tax relief targeted at everyday Floridians: families, students, sports fans, pet lovers, homeowners, new parents, outdoor lovers, mobile homeowners, skilled workers, kids in the child welfare system, businesses, state park attendees,

moviegoers, schools and Floridians affected by natural disasters. This year's tax package is the biggest middle-class tax cut in Florida history, and it benefits everyone.

Representative Bobby Payne said, "From diapers to pet supplies, school supplies, sporting events and disaster preparedness supplies, we are providing broad-based tax relief that every Floridian can benefit from."

• HB 539, sponsored by **House Appropriations Committee Chair Jay Trumbull**, R-Panama City, strengthens nursing home transparency by requiring them to report audited financial information just like hospitals. It positions the state to keep taxpayer dollars secure by improving the information nursing homes report.

"You cannot manage what you do not measure," said **Representative Jay Trumbull**. "In the Sunshine State, transparency is vital to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, and this bill is a great step forward to help the Legislature manage the state's resources."

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